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Eisenhower in the White House

By Robert J. Donovan

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President Gets Word of Stalin's Illness and Death; U. S. Studies Meaning of 'Downgrading' of Dictator

This is the first of a series of articles based on Robert J. Donovan's book, "Eisenhower—The Inside Story," a behind-the-scenes account of the Administration to be published in June by Harper & Brothers.

When the Eisenhower administration was barely six weeks old, it had to furrow its brow and go into a deep study of a momentous event. Stalin died. Today, the study is fully as intensive. The top government officials believe that the current Soviet campaign to wipe out Stalin worship in Russia is one of the major developments of post-war history.

The story started an hour and a half after midnight on March 3, 1953. The telephone rang in the H St. home of Robert Cutler, who was then President Eisenhower's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs.

Cutler woke up, answered, and heard the voice of Allen W. Dulles, brother of the Secretary of State and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. "Have you heard the news?" said Dulles.

"What news?" Cutler asked sleepily.

"Stalin has suffered a stroke," replied Dulles, "and he may be dying."

Meeting at 7 A. M. At White House

Dulles has immediate telephone access to Eisenhower day and night. In this case, they decided to let the President sleep. They also decided to hold a meeting in the White House at 7 a. m. before Eisenhower would arrive.

Telephones rang all night. At the 7 a. m. meeting, in addition to Dulles and Cutler, were James Hagerty, the President's press secretary, and C. D. Jackson, his adviser on psychological strategy.

"What can we do about this?" Eisenhower demanded as he walked in at 7:40 o'clock, wearing a tan polo coat and a brown hat with the brim snapped far down over his forehead.

They drew up a statement which expressed America's hope that "the Almighty will watch over the people of that vast country and bring them, in His wisdom, opportunity to live their lives in a world where all men and women and children dwell in peace and comradeship."

The President was at dinner with Mrs. Eisenhower on the evening of March 5 when Hagerty telephoned the news that—as Moscow phrased it—"the heart of the comrade and inspired continuer of Lenin's will, the wise



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President Eisenhower at his desk in the White House on his first day in office.

leader and teacher of the Communist party and the Soviet people—Josef Vissarionovich Stalin—has stopped beating."

The message sent to the Kremlin by the President was unusual in diplomacy because it pointedly omitted any praise for Stalin. "The government of the United States," it said, "tenders its official condolence to the government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the death of Generalissimo Josef Stalin, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union."

The omission turned out to be prescient. Three years later, Nikita S. Khrushchev launched a propaganda campaign that startled the world. He attacked Stalin in a speech at the twentieth Communist party Congress in February, 1956. While this speech was kept secret, the new line began to appear in the Communist party newspaper "Pravda" in March. It attacked Stalin for "monstrous

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excesses" in his pursuance of "the cult of the individual." The "Pravda" attack was carried further on April 7 in reprinting a Chinese Communist editorial from the newspaper "Jen Min Jih Pao." Stalin was accused of having neglected "necessary preventive measures on the eve of the anti-Fascist war."

The diplomatic grapevine said Khrushchev had accused Stalin of being both a murderer in the purges and a blunderer in conduct of policy.

Then began the renewed intensive study of the Russian enigma by top United States officials, with the purpose of recasting American policy in the light of the new Soviet development.

The thinking of these top officials in the spring of 1956 can, perhaps, most easily be put in question-and-answer form.

Was it risky business for Khrushchev, et al, to "downgrade" Stalin?

Indeed, yes. It is difficult to tell a people that all the views about Stalin which they had been told to accept—which had been drummed into them for almost a generation—should now be discarded. If Stalin now turns out to have been a false idol, maybe one cannot trust his successors, either. Maybe the dream of Communist infallibility is swept away. There were pro-Stalin riots in Tiflis, Georgia, Stalin's home country. The satellite countries have been restive under this sudden mental revolution.

Then why did Khrushchev, et al, adopt this risky course?

Two reasons: one which concerned themselves deeply; the other which concerned their future policies.

1. Stalin's prime offense was not his ruthlessness in general, as it is being portrayed, but his turning the power of the police against the party itself, whereby he destroyed the institution and the power of the Communist party. He held the people around him—including the new rulers of the Kremlin—in fear. They do not wish a repetition of one-man dictatorship.

2. The new rulers decided that they had to destroy the Stalin glorification in order to achieve freedom of action and flexibility of policies, both domestic and foreign. They decided that they had to do it completely in order to rewrite history books and discard Stalin slogans which for so long had become "doctrine."

Control Is Sought Over New Class

In the domestic field, they wanted to keep control of a surprising new bourgeois class which has grown up in the Soviet Union. This is the industrial-managerial class with its natural ally, the scientific-technological class. This stratum of society is necessary to build Soviet power.

Is the "collective leadership" fact or fiction?

Fact. Khrushchev is the most powerful figure on the eleven-man ruling Presidium, but he is no dictator. When the Presidium is not unanimous, it takes a vote, and the majority

prevails. Malenkov, though downgraded, still is a high-ranking power. Eight years younger than Khrushchev, he may yet rise to the top. He lost out because he was too "Left Wing"—he wanted to go too far toward improving the people's lot by wider distribution of consumer goods.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union remains a totalitarian dictatorship. There is absolutely no play of public opinion. The Presidium governs every detail of Soviet economy, education, press, etc.

Is the Soviet economy weak?

No. It is expanding. It can certainly fulfill any promises of aid which Moscow offers to underdeveloped countries. The Soviet Union does have its own farm problem, the reverse of America's. It is plagued by scarcities instead of surpluses. But this has a certain advantage in dealing with underdeveloped agricultural countries. Russia can accept their foodstuffs—some of which are surplus on the world market—in exchange for aid.

Is the danger to us greater or less in the light of the anti-Stalin drive?

Probably greater. Not the immediate danger; our intelligence indicates that the new rulers of the Soviet Union do not want a general war, at least for several years. However, Russia is becoming more menacing as a military power, putting the highest priority on maintaining the latest weapons of war. Furthermore, the new regime continues to embrace an ideology that has been aggressive and that does not recognize the permanence of any form of government of society other than its own.

Reds Seek Look of Sweetness and Light

One of the purposes of the anti-Stalin drive is to give the Soviet Union a new look of sweetness and light. This can be expected to win new friends not only in the neutralist countries of Asia but perhaps even in Western Europe. Russia's branching out with aid programs is part of the campaign, as is its foray into the Middle East.

This is undoubtedly a shrewder method of undermining the loose coalitions of the free world than was Stalin's bullyragging method. And the overriding target of the present Soviet leaders is the disruption and disintegration of the Western defense system.

At the time of Stalin's death, President Eisenhower told the Cabinet on March 6, 1953, that he was not satisfied with the government's preparations for the event. He said the old Psychological Strategy Board had been speculating on what would happen when Stalin died. But now that death had come, he complained, he had looked in vain for any plans or studies that might have been worked out in advance so that the government would be ready to react. He said the lack of planning was a fresh indication of the necessity for such work as was then being performed by C. D. Jackson and Robert Cutler.

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(The second of this series, appearing tomorrow, details the steps taken by the White House to end segregation.)

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Recent attacks on Stalin by Russia's leaders have led the Eisenhower administration to begin renewed intensive study of Soviet policy. In this photo, taken in 1937, Stalin and Nikita S. Khrushchev, now Communist party head, share the same reviewing stand at a parade in Moscow. Left to right: Nikolai M. Shvernik, then secretary of the All-Union Council of Trade Unions and later president of the Supreme Soviet; Mr. Khrushchev, then a member of the Supreme Soviet; the late Georgi Dimitrov, then secretary general of the Comintern and later Premier of Communist Bulgaria, and the late Soviet dictator.



Robert Cutler (left) and C. D. Jackson, who, in 1953, as Presidential Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and adviser on psychological strategy respectively, planned for events such as the death of Stalin.

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